

Curbing woman and child trafficking

Common strategy by all South Asian countries needed

THE demand by South Asian women activists for setting up regional and international courts to hand down severe punishment to those who torture women is timely. The demand was made from no ordinary platform, a jury board comprising of renowned women activists from around the world and South Asia in particular placed it after hearing the tragic and painful stories of sufferings, torment of trafficked women from their own mouths in a symbolic court held in Dhaka recently. We agree fully with one of the jury members, Winnie Mandela, in saying that 'there should be proper formulation, enactment and implementation of laws against the perpetrators.'

Otherwise we would continue to witness the rise in numbers of women and children being trafficked from all the South Asian countries. The information disclosed at the three-day long court sessions that nearly three and a half thousand children had gone missing from Bangladesh in last ten years and only 69 of them have been found is not only alarming but very frightening at the same time. It dawns on us only at such times that whether what we had was enough to curb such gross violation of human rights. As the members of the jury rightly pointed out that merely enacting a law is not enough, it's been proven time and again that strict laws with harsh punishments can not deter crimes committed against women and children.

And in this case, we think SAARC can play the most constructive role. Firstly, because the member countries have to realise that the nature of trafficking of women and children is almost the same in all the countries, the crisis is not limited within one country only and secondly, because of the similar pattern of women repression, all the countries can take a common strategy in order to control the ever increasing trend of crime against women. Raising educational standard at the grassroots level and making the law enforcing agencies more efficient and less corrupt should be the primary concern of that strategy. We join our voices and efforts with the South Asian Court for Women in raising awareness on discrimination against women in our society.

DMCH Emergency

The outsiders must be evicted

OUTSIDERS have taken charge of the Emergency unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The patients have to pay the outsiders at every step to get admitted to the emergency and are often harassed if they fail to meet their demands. This has been going on for many years at the country's biggest hospital, which caters to the needs of a huge number of people.

The problems that arise when untrained and inefficient outsiders are left or allowed to look after critically injured or sick patients are manifold. First, the patients cannot get the service that they need when they have to rely on these laymen working as substitutes for trained personnel. Secondly, they have to pay an extra amount of money for the service provided in addition to other costs that they often have to bear. Thirdly, the presence of outsiders has created a chaotic situation at the hospital as patients and their attendants do not know whether they are dealing with hospital staff or outsiders. Fourth, the security of the hospital can be at stake when outsiders take charge of emergency services.

However, it seems the hospital management has more or less accepted the presence of the outsiders. Else, they would have made some efforts to dislodge them. The hospital does not have an adequate number of ward boys or personnel deployed at the emergency to handle the rush of patients. So the hospital managers are not doing anything against the undesirable elements, or that is the impression one gets after observing the situation. But what they are ignoring in the process is that a hospital is not the place for such untrained people who can cause irreparable damage to a patient through mishandling. It is also a matter of concern that the outsiders cannot be held responsible if something goes wrong. Furthermore, they are exploiting the helplessness of the patients in every possible way.

It is far too evident that the outsiders have made their way into the hospital with the support of the regular staff. The hospital authorities should not treat the problem as a minor one as it has a bearing on the quality of treatment that patients are getting. The outsiders must be evicted and replaced with trained personnel to handle the patients seeking admission to the emergency.

WASHINGTON CONSENSUS-2

How free is free market?

AKN AHMED

ANOTHER key element of Washington Consensus is free market or market capitalism. Ever since President Reagan came to power in early 80s this has been a buzz word and successive presidents have been eloquent in their praise of this concept for curing all economic ills and poverty all over the world. In fact, this precept is being administered under the direction of USA and Western powers by IMF and World Bank as a strategy of development of Washington Consensus. The mood of the moment is such that markets are perceived as both virtue and necessity. The new orthodoxy believes that in so far as democracy is about political freedom for individuals, markets are about economic freedom for individuals. Those who propagate the magic of market forces keep away from the public certain fallacies inherent in this gospel. The proposition that the markets create equal opportunities for all depends on the critical assumption that the initial distribution of property rights is equal. Thus any defence of the market on the premise that it is good in terms of actual outcome must rest on a defence of the initial distribution of property rights.

Furthermore, the arguments that market protects the interest of individuals is limited, for such individuals are not guaranteed access to the market as buyers since their needs formulated as demand is not backed by purchasing power to make it an effective demand. Markets, in fact, exclude a significant portion of the people, particularly the poor from the process of development. Thus people experience exclusion from the market if they have neither assets nor capabilities. It will be foolish to think that those who propagate the superiority of market forces do not understand inherent weakness of their argument. They do. Not only that. In point of fact they, particularly USA

practices domestically something different from what they preach.

Example 1: Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, a US government owned institution, provides insurance cover to individual depositors up to \$100,000.00. This practice has been going on since the last Great Depression even though the banks are supposed to compete in free market by swimming and sinking.

given to American farmers to grow agricultural crops despite their continued inability to face the competitive forces in the market. Much to the detriment of interest of farmers in other poor countries struggling hard to survive, despite the fact that they are able to produce the same at internationally competitive price in the free market.

Example 7: When Pennsylvania Railroad collapsed US Government

billion implying an average of 25 times its capital. At the same time it was managing total gross national off-balance sheet derivative contracts amounting to about \$1.3 trillion. In the wake of East Asian financial crisis, it was caught up in a very messy position of big mismatch between its receivables and payables. It was sure to go to liquidation. But it was bailed out and its shareholders were rescued by the

US government has to take such measures to help those who are vulnerable to the evils of market forces.

But the question that is often asked is: Why then similar measures taken by poorer countries for the same reasons are often being disapproved by Washington Consensus? Take for example Bangladesh. She has been asked by the IMF and the World Bank who admin-

We must admit that free market is neither a virtue nor a necessity. It should be embraced only to the extent it brings wellbeing to the people and as much as it is acceptable to the people at any point of time. This is a political decision, which should not be left solely to the technicians. It must be clearly understood that free market may be a good example of oxymoron but is a bad prescription for implementation indiscriminately.

Example 2: Under Community Reimbursement Act and Equal Opportunity Act, passed by US Government, banks are legally required to extend credit to specific areas and specific group of people; when under free market doctrine, banks are supposed to act as free agents in investing their resources.

Example 3: Under another law, Small Business Administration helps and provides credit to small-scale undertakings. It also provides counseling to them on business management, market study, upgrading the quality of products and arranges that some slices of big government and defence contracts are awarded to such undertaking.

Example 4: Under Higher Education Act, United States Government provides loans to college students and their parents at low rates of interest to finance their studies.

Example 5: Under a Minority Deposit Programme, US Treasury Department officially designates certain financial institutions as minority controlled and encourages governments, corporations to deposit money with them. These institutions in turn make loans to members of the minority community who do not have ready access to mainstream banking system.

Example 6: Huge subsidies are

intervened to avert a crisis in railroad communication and by involving its funds brought Amtrak to existence which is still running with subsidy provided by the government year after year.

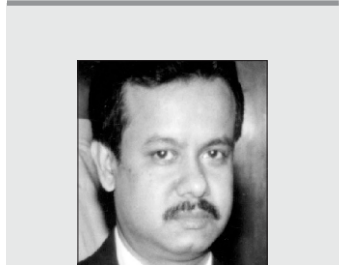
Example 8: Long Term Capital Management Limited owned by a small group of very rich people and functioning outside the ambit of any regulatory oversight manages a big hedge fund. At the beginning of 1998 with the capital of just \$4.8 billion LTCM managed balance sheet positions totaling about \$120

intervention of US Treasury and Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Critics saw this rescue operation as unwise government intervention into a crisis that market should have resolved.

The above instances have been cited not to suggest that those interventions were inherently bad or not useful, but to demonstrate the vanilla fact that, unlike virgin olive oil, there is no virgin free market anywhere in the world, US included as advocated by Washington Consensus. It is well understood why



Inside out



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

WE don't have much of a society but a collection of neighbourhoods. We don't have much of a neighbourhood, but a collection of families. We don't have much of a family but a collection of individuals. We don't have much of an individual, but a collection of instincts. We don't have much of an instinct, but a collection of inclinations. We don't have much of an inclination, but a collection of preferences. We don't have much of a preference, but a collection of choices. We don't have much of a choice, but a collection of options.

The option is the power, opportunity or right of an individual to make a choice. It is the epicentre from which the shock waves of life radiate. What does it matter if you will agree with me or not, because consensus means nothing unless first there is an option. Your thoughts are as good as my thoughts. Everybody dares and nobody cares unless option makes connection with choice, and then builds the road to a social destination.

Edmund Burke, the Irish man of

letters, said that society was indeed a contract, a partnership not only between those who were living, but also between those who were living, those who were dead, and those who were to be born. Thus the social destination of man is a manifestation of his destiny, which unfolds in the backward and forward linkages of his existence. He will be, therefore he is and he was, the earthly life being the mere footprints of a journey that starts before him and lasts

inhaled or exhaled. The life that never was before it congealed in a womb and the life that never will be after it has thawed in a grave, it is the entity that changes from one state to another, while the essence remains the same. If you wish to know, this is the connection between the unborn, the living and the dead.

That makes society a halfway house between the origin and the destination of man. The family is merely a rite of passage, parents,

teaches is the ability to make choices. Which means there are options, which rise from the depth of blood and density of flesh, which can be comprehended when one concentrates on the inner self and immerses in the subtle forces that operate inside. Options are like combustion in an engine, firing the choices, which fire the instincts, which propel the locomotion of life.

That accentuates the protocol of body with soul. One must stay in

soul like a candidate loses touch with the constituency.

English detective fiction writer Dorothy Sayers writes in *Creed or Chaos* that a society in which consumption has to be artificially stimulated in order to keep production going is a society founded on trash and waste, and such a society is a house built upon sand. What happens to the individual in such a society? He is merely a chute in the waste disposal system, his soul

sufficient for himself, and he cannot hibernate either in his body or soul. But he can neither let one harass the other. If he does he becomes a disjunct, lonely in the crowd, the odd man out, the mental case.

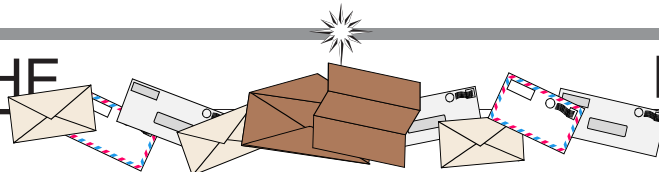
There is then a thin line between man and society, and that thin line is, once again, the contact between body and soul. Where that contact is remiss, individuals alienate from families, families alienate from neighbourhoods and the society is an archipelago where the individual islands aren't connected. Selfishness is but a variation of that isolation, when a man is in excessive contact with himself only either in his body or in his soul, but not in both. Selfish people often extend that contact to their families, giving preference to their own wellbeing over the good of the commonwealth.

It results in the Brownian motion. Individuals go in different directions like particles suspended in a liquid or gas medium, bringing collisions, which implicate chaos. Families remain a loose cluster of individuals and neighbourhoods remain a loose cluster of families, whereas the society is no more than wandering tribes within an organised concept.

We need to turn that society inside out, and the individuals need to take a hard look at what is inside them. Familiarity is like charity, which begins at home. There is no society unless, first, you have known and understood who you are and what it is about.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Donor prescription and Communicative English

Overall English skills of our learners, especially from mainstream Bangla-medium is not very good. Even a good many of graduates from universities could not compose a letter properly in many cases. It is a matter of great concern. Department for International Development Bangladesh of UK played a vital role in developing communicative methods as is mentioned in the preface of the books published by NBCT. When donors prescribed us to plant trees, we did it vehemently. After some years, we discovered that some foreign trees were not friendly to our environment. Even some of those trees caused a great harm to our lands and as a result, the lands are gradually losing fertility. In many cases, our country-

men failed to see the future when donors suggested something. However, communicative method is introduced in our educational system recently in lieu of old method. Possibly, it aims to develop the skills of listening, writing, reading and speaking of a learner as a whole. The Communicative method has arisen controversies, as our resources are very limited.

Again, most of our schools contain little resources let alone audio-visual system. Large portion of the books dealt with listening comprehension that invariably needs at least hearing aids with audio supported classrooms. How could we expect maximum benefits from the Communicative method?

Moreover, students have started neglecting grammar, as it does not have a direct use in the Communicative method. Though a professor (Md. Zahid Akter) of Leading Univer-

sity, Sylhet advocated for the Communicative method in a letter published in The Daily Star on Wednesday August13; it is the grim reality that students don't feel interested to learn grammar in the newly introduced method.

To recapitulate, we need a total review of our English learning system. Lack of foresightedness has already caused much damage to us. But we could still do some better tasks if we become serious.

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Nuclear is more than just a weapon

North Korea is probably a lot closer to developing nuclear than many of us think. Why else would a man like

Bush try to use diplomacy (a word almost unknown in his dictionary) even after being smacked in the face many times by N. Korea? Perhaps Mr. Bush knows that force is not an option with N. Korea. Iran on the other hand, is no way near of developing any serious nuclear and perhaps that is why there is a completely different approach with Iran by Mr Bush. Unlike N Korea, Iran wants a diplomatic solution but president Bush wants to send in the boys! Last time when India tested its nukes, America was so angry that it tried to punish India both politically and financially. Recently however, Mr Bush was kind enough to suggest that there might be a possibility for India to become a permanent member of UN. It is amazing how quickly the colour changes. The idea is very simple; any country that hasn't got nuke or other nasty weapons to cause serious damage, use

force to undermine them and stop them from developing weapons. However, once a country develops substantial amount of nuke, just shake hands with them and get them on your side e.g. India.

It seems that, nuclear is a Green Card to prosperity, respect, power, recognition and endless other things. Nuclear is a passport to the club of the "civilised". Nuclear is a magic wand that waives all your misdeeds and sins for you. Nuclear is "exclusive" only for those who call themselves civilised, democratic, and are definitely non-Muslim! People invite you for big dinners if you have nukes. Who knows, if you are a young man and have nukes, some wise old man may even accept you as his son-in-law! The possibilities are infinite. No wonder a lot of racists and fascists out there don't want Muslim countries to have nukes. But then again, Muslims and

Arabs don't need any nukes, do they? If anything goes wrong, they have their friends to help them with weapons like "road-maps", "peace plans", "negotiations", "visions" and of course low-rate loan from WB! Whether it is for generating electricity or for defending their land, Muslims under any circumstances must not be allowed to get their hands on nuclear -- a lot of clever people are working over-time to make sure of that. If Muslims get their hands on nukes, how will some "good" people get away with looting Muslim's resources and stealing their lands?

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

Biman DC 10 and Brussels Airport

While thanking the Almighty for his kindness for all the passengers of the Biman DC 10 having landed

safely, one question haunts my mind. Brussels Airport authority was informed of the problem and our pilots requested for a landing at Brussels. Obviously the Biman pilots thought of the excellent facilities that the European Airports have for handling emergencies. Brussels airport refused the request on the pretext that the landing would mean the same either at Brussels or Bangladesh thereby disregarding passenger safety concerns.

Now my question is would they have done the same in a similar incident either with American Airlines, Continental, Delta, Singapore or Thai Airlines?

Ahmed Ismail Hossain
Gulshan, Dhaka

Savings certificates

The news in DS dated 06.07.03 reducing the interest rates on saving certificates to as low as 8 per cent

from the current 12 per cent sent a chill to all those who largely depend on the interest accrued quarterly or six monthly. Note must be made that all certificate holders are paying 5 per cent tax, which was never levied in the past. I don't understand why our economy is compared with India and Pakistan and thus follow their example. The picture is rather differ in India and Pakistan they are more stable and much larger compared to ours. Even their inflation rate is lower including cost of living.

Since the coming of this government the prices of daily necessities has increased manifold so has inflation. The value of taka is also decreasing. I would urge our respected finance minister not to put the lives of the middle class into further misery.

Mushtaque Ahmed
Uttara, Dhaka